CLASS 2: John 4 & the Woman at the Well

The Samaritans were the descendants of the remaining Israelites and the Gentile nations brought in to occupy the country of Israel (the Northern Ten Tribes) by the Assyrian King Sargon II in 721 BC. In II Kings 17 we are told that these Gentiles failed to honor Jehovah, and a plague of lions came upon them. In order to rectify the situation, the Assyrian king sent a Levite priest to teach the Gentiles the ways of Jehovah. The recorder of II Kings notes that these people then created a religion which combined their paganism and the Law of Moses. They took the name of the previous inhabitants of the land, and are known as the Samaritans. They saw themselves as the children of Israel, as seen when in this chapter the woman at the well calls Jacob her father.

The relationship between the Samaritans and the Jews was volatile. When the Jews had first returned from Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans offered to assist in rebuilding the temple, and were refused1. Again, decades later, Nehemiah's restoration efforts opposed the Samaritans nearly to the point of war2. The Samaritans constantly sought to worship in the temple in Jerusalem, but were always refused. Their position is worthy of some pity; having a knowledge of God, they are excluded from worship in the temple. Sometime after this, the Samaritans built a temple for (their) Jehovah on Mount Gerizim3 . Even today, Samaritans maintain that this is the true Mount Moriah (as opposed to the identification in II Chronicles 3:1 as it being at the city of Jerusalem), and therefore the true location God desired the Temple. The tension of this temple's existence culminated either under the Greeks (per the Jewish Talmud) or the Hasmoneans (per Josephus), when Jews destroyed this Samaritan temple.

Thus, we can see the animosity of the Jew and the Samaritan in the background as Jesus meets with the Samaritan woman at the well. We can understand why she is astonished that He, a Jew, would even speak with her, a Samaritan. Jesus speaks of the living water that He can provide; this is the third of the seven waters John describes. This is the idea of the life that is in Jesus Christ, a life that Jesus has described already as being born again. How can Jesus prove He is one who can give this? By discerning her spiritual condition. She is morally wrecked; a woman with five husbands, and living in fornication even now with someone else. To her credit, she is not offended by Jesus' critical eye, but astounded that He knows these things. She concludes that He is a prophet.

What is this "Living Water"? Jesus explains it later on in the book. Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water*.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39). The Living Water is the Spirit, who for us is manifested as the Word of God. This understanding makes a bridge to the next point.

Now begins an even more wonderful conversation: the worship of God. Here is the contention between the Jew and the Samaritan, one which has produced wars, and left the

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[1] Ezra 4:1-5
[2] Nehemiah 4:2
[3] Lipschitz, Knoppers, Albertz; Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.; Eisenbrauns, 2007 pg 157

Samaritans with no place to worship. Jesus pulls no punches, so to speak. He is clear that the Samaritans are not a people of promise, and that their traditions of the place of worship were not of knowledge (fact), but tradition only. What is not of knowledge is not of truth; we need to have that in mind for the next few statements. Then Jesus makes an even a more astonishing statement: soon, the temple in Jerusalem will cease to be the place of worship. If that is not sufficiently shocking, Jesus then infers that Samaritans will be welcome at the new temple, since God's desire is than anyone who is willing to worship Him in spirit and truth is invited to worship.

"Truth" and "Spirit" are clearly defined in the Gospel of John, so we need not speculate as to the meaning. TRUTH - "*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*" (John 17:17). SPIRIT - "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*" (John 6:63). Both terms are defined by the same idea – the Word of God is both Truth AND Spirit.

Jesus is suggesting that there are two kinds of worship: spiritual worship, and earthly, or physical (sometimes called carnal) worship. We might consider that this is a theme expounded on much by later New Testament writers, that is, the contrast between the physical worship of the Old Covenant, and the Spiritual worship of the New Covenant. We know the Truth is the knowledge of God; now we know the Spirit is the spiritual mind.

The Old Physical Covenant Hebrews 9:1-8		The New Spiritual Covenant Hebrews 9:9-15	
Physical Temple	I Kings 6:12-14	Spiritual Temple	Ephesians 2:20-22
Physical Jerusalem	1 Kings 11:36	Spiritual Jerusalem	Hebrews 12:22
Physical Israel	Ezekiel 21:2	Spiritual Israel	Romans 11:26
Physical Priesthood	Exodus 40:15	Spiritual Priesthood	I Peter 2:5
Physical Sacrifices	Leviticus 1:2	Spiritual Sacrifices	Romans 12:1
Physical Music	I Chronicles 6:32	Spiritual Music	Hebrews 13:15-16

The disciples return at the conclusion of this conversation. They are puzzled at the discussion they see with Jesus and the Samaritan woman, but do not ask what is occurring. The woman returns to her village, to testify to her people that she has met one she believes to be the prophet. These people then ask Jesus to stay, and are ultimately convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the World.

When Jesus ascended to heaven in Acts chapter one, He told His apostles that they would spread the Gospel to the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, then to the Samaritans, then to the rest of the world. The Samaritans represent the transition between the Jew and Gentile. Perhaps we can even see the providence of God, in creating a people that would be a perfect bridge for the Gospel to cross from the Jew first then to the Gentile.

Perhaps my favorite thought is this – she left her water pot at the well. How many others (Matthew's booth, James & John's boat, etc.) left things behind when they found Jesus!